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MUNICIPAL FOOD SERVICE.

I.—The Supply of Cooked Food.

What has the Food Controller done for us? is the question constantly asked by working women. It is not easy to find anything to say in reply. We are all being pressed to reduce our consumption of bread, we are still unable to get even the three-quarters of a pound of sugar which is said to be there for each, the high price of meat makes it a real luxury, and now potatoes, one of our principal supplies, are almost unobtainable.

Many families of the poorer working class, and especially large families, live almost entirely on bread, and in these homes the amount of cooking done is very small. The mother has little time, few appliances, can afford little coal or gas, and finally has very often no knowledge of cooking at all. The best substitutes for bread and meat are, for the most part, foods which need cooking. Tinned foods may go some way, but restrictions on imports are hitting this source of supply, and in any case tinned food is not the healthiest form of diet. Another substitute for wheaten bread, to give only one example, is barley. Barley, however, is not only troublesome to cook, but takes a very long time. In a large number of cases, therefore, even if the housewife has the necessary knowledge of cooking, she has not the time and cannot afford the fuel to use barley for food. In varying degrees, these difficulties face all working women.

To meet their needs the best method seems to be to meet the need of the working people by providing cooked food for them in a municipal kitchen at a price which would cover the cost of food preparation and management.

They would also be a great help to women at work outside their homes who have families to provide for. For these the municipal kitchen would be a most important boon. Now they have no time to prepare meals in any but the most hurried and unsatisfactory manner, and even to do that is to place an additional strain upon their strength.

Such communal kitchens should be under municipal management in order to secure popular control and to enable them to be established in all parts of the country.

The Kitchen should be managed by a committee with a large representation of working women and persons with knowledge of the subjects concerned. There should be professional management of the buying, cooking, and distribution. The Bradford kitchens at which the 7,000 school meals are prepared would serve as a good model. The kitchen should first be tried in large working-class neighbourhoods, and one kitchen should serve several depots for selling the food. It would be taken home by buyers and not eaten on the premises.

The following suggestions for the establishment of a Central Kitchen with distributing depots in London will show how a Communal Kitchen might be conducted:—

KITCHEN: The cooking should be done at a Central Kitchen and distributed to various depots for sale. One of the kitchens of the many commandeered hotels should be obtained for this purpose. The Hotel Cecil

the Hotel Metropole, or the Hotel Victoria would be very suitable, since they are near the centre of London, and as South London would provide a good area for the experiment it would be convenient to have the Central Kitchen on the Embankment.

DEPOTS: Depots should be established in, say, Bermondsey, Walworth, Lambeth, and Camberwell. A small shop would serve the purpose admirably, and it would be well to have the shop in a good street.

TRANSPORT: For taking the food from the kitchens it would be necessary to have a light commercial motor van. This would not be a full day's work.

EQUIPMENT: The equipment now in the kitchen would be sufficient. For the van it would be necessary to supply trays and air-tight, tin-lined boxes. At the shops the necessary equipment would consist of a cash register for facilitating the checking of payments and rapidity of work, and a hot plate for the food to be kept hot on, if desired. This might at first be dispensed with, though it would have great advantages in popularising the depot.

MANAGEMENT: The whole should be managed by a committee of people who have practical knowledge of marketing, cooking, and the needs of the working people. There should be a large representation of working women. Under the committee there should be a Directress, who would do the buying, keep the books (or be responsible for them), oversee the whole of the work and the arrangements; a head cook and as many assistants as necessary; a van driver and portress; a shop manager at each depot, who might be assisted by voluntary workers.

DISTRIBUTION: Each day there should be two deliveries of food at each depot. The van should leave on its first round between 8 and 8-30, and on its second between 3 and 4. The food taken from the kitchens to the depots would be carefully invoiced, and the price at which it was to be sold marked. The food that it was necessary to keep hot would be in the air-tight boxes. The van when delivering the food would take in return any left over from the previous day, which would be duly booked in at the Central Kitchen and probably made use of for the next delivery.

HOURS OF OPENING: The depots should be open each day from 10 to 2 in the morning and 6 to 8 in the evening. If the depot grew in popularity the hours might be extended, but these would probably be the busiest times.

METHODS OF SELLING: The food would be sold to buyers at a reasonable price to cover cost. The buyer would be expected either to bring her own receptacle or to pay a deposit on the receptacle given by the depot, which she would redeem when she brought it back. These receptacles would be sent back to the Central Kitchen for washing. So far as possible, the food would be sold hot, but it might be sold ready to be heated at home.

BILL OF FARE: Each week a list of the bill of fare for each day would be posted in the shop window. This might not be absolutely complete, but would give the principal things. On a large notice board there would be a list of the dishes for that day. The prices per pound or per pint would also be posted with the lists.

Each day there should be at least one of the following classes of food:—
Porridge.

Soup.—Examples: Barley, lentil, onion, carrot, haricot bean, Scotch broth. etc.

Stew or other Principal Dish.—Examples: Beef stew with vegetables. Tripe and Onions. Irish Stew. Rabbit Stew. Sheep's Head with Barley. Mutton with Vegetables. Vegetable Stew. Vegetable Pie. Suet Pudding with meat or vegetables. Bean Cake. Fish Stew. Savoury Rice. Scalloped Potatoes. Creamed Vegetables. Corned Beef Hash. Rissoles. Potato Balls.

Pudding.—Examples: Suet Puddings. Other Steamed Puddings. Rice Puddings. Custard Shapes and Chocolate Shapes. Fruit Puddings.

Savoury mixtures for eating with bread, such as bean or cheese sandwich filling, potted fish or meat.

Bread Substitutes, such as barley cakes, oat cakes, rice loaves:

There might be one or two meatless days a week.

In choosing each week what the main part of the menu should be the Directress would have regard to the supplies of food that could most safely be used that week, and in doing this she should act in close co-operation with the Food Controller's Department.

EXPERIMENTAL AND EDUCATIONAL SECTION.—There should be an effort made to have such a section connected with the Kitchen and the depots. Whenever possible simple recipes might be given away, and suggestions for dealing with anything that might be left over should be given with the food. There might also be a special department dealing with food suitable for the sick and for the little children, and milk foods for nursing mothers and young children might be given through the depots. The cooking of food in hay-boxes might be shown, and cooking lessons and lectures given. But the main work of the whole establishment would be the provision of well-cooked food to enable the poorer folk to get sufficient nourishment at present prices, and in spite of restrictions on the consumption of the staple foods of to-day.

The difficulties foreseen by various people to a scheme on these lines are chiefly the lack of (a) labour, (b) equipment, (c) popularity.

LACK OF LABOUR: The amount of labour is nothing in comparison with the amount that is lost daily by muddling along with the people's food supply, buying and selling minute quantities over the counter, cooking, and keeping up separate fires in every little house, and thus using far more gas, coal, and the labour involved by producing each, than is necessary. The cooks could be easily trained in a few centres, such as that at Bradford, and, from the experience of the Unemployed Women's Work Rooms run by the Central Committee on Women's Employment, it has been demonstrated that the training can be quickly and successfully carried out. At these centres smaller quantities were cooked than would be prepared at the Municipal Kitchens. but the cost was less than if each woman had cooked her meal in her own home. It is not work for which very young men or women are required, and there is still a sufficiency of middle-aged labour available. In any case, feeding the people well is national and essential work.

LACK OF EQUIPMENT: The equipment in commandeered hotel kitchens and that at school meal centres—now almost unused—might well be taken over, but new equipment can still be obtained for the many canteens that are being provided, and that, indeed, with very little delay. Probably existing kitchen accommodation could be utilised to a far greater extent and for longer hours than at present.

LACK OF POPULARITY: In poor districts the popularity of the kitchen would very quickly be established. There is already a kitchen on lines similar to those indicated above run by the Workers' Suffrage Federation in



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Bow, and it has been very favourably received. Such opposition as there may be to such projects is due to old-fashioned and conservative instincts. This was shown at the conference held by the Women's Labour League on February 24th, when out of about 200 working women's representatives some ten or twelve voted against the proposal. They did so on the mistaken ground that it would be compulsory to use the kitchen, if established, and on the peculiar ground that they would not eat anything that they had not cooked themselves! Such instinctive objections, so wholly unreasonable, since bread itself, the staple food of so many, is cooked before it comes into a London home, would soon give way before the necessity that the present restriction in supplies has created. For scarcity of staple foods always falls very hardly on the working women, substitution of other foods for bread being a great difficulty. It must mean additional expense and additional labour unless communal methods replace the present system.

What practical steps can we take?

First. Point out to the Food Controller the needs of working women.

Second. Urge upon him the advantages of Municipal Kitchens and the need for pointing these out to the Local Authorities and giving them power and encouragement to proceed with their establishment.

Third. Bring the matter before your Local Authority and **keep it there.**

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